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782 Where the custom of making a fire on Saint Ivan's day is still prevalent in a more complete form, the lads and the girls set on fire at sunset straw pyres mixed with fragrant herbs. The fire is laid on a square place. The ceremony is long, and some people — perhaps the old, perhaps those whose turn comes late — will find it boring . . . It is as long as the song of Saint Ivan's night . . .

But let us go nearer to the game. It is just beginning, as the song — the song of Saint Ivan — says :

We lay his fire,
We lay it on a square ;
In one of its corners
Sit good looking old men,
In its second corner
Sit good looking old women,
In its third corner
Sit good looking young lads,
In its fourth corner
Sit beautiful young girls.

Everyone is placed in his or her traditional place, in the four corners of the world sit the four groups of people ; each bunch gathered according to age and sex. Saint Ivan's fire is not burning yet . . . It is just being laid . . . Then the charming of the young couples begins, they are «sung together», so that in the words of the minstrels, they shall be «spun and woven» together with the blessing of the common song, that is public opinion . . . The song links each boy with a girl, calling them out in couples in due order and with full names :

Whose horses are over there
Under the great mountains?
There indeed I can see
The horses of (Stephen Nagy).
(Anne Kiss) return me my horses
I will also return you
Your geese.

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When every couple has been charmed and «sung together» with the magic song, then Saint Ivan's square fire is also lit beside the flaming fire of love! The fragrant fire of the flowery saint is lit amidst this song: 527 782

Flowery Saint John,
Your night is light;
While I am before you
I'll honour you;
Keep light so long
And be dark after that.

It is possible that the memory of the cult of the two fires, the heavenly and the human fire, is lurking in this verse. Now comes a ceremony of a strange purifying nature, which once upon a time may have even implied human sacrifice to the sun or to the fire. This can be guessed from the following verse of the song, though of course these hypotheses have to be handled with great caution:

(Stephen Nagy's) stone house should be set on fire.
Let us put it out! Let us put it out!
We must not desert the poor wretches!
(Anne Kiss') stone house should be set on fire.
Let us put it out! Let us put it out!
We must not desert the poor wretches!

That the festive fire was a sacrifice as well as a ceremony we infer not only from the fragrant herbs which are mixed with the straw, but from the fact that in certain places the girls go to the fire in a procession with flower wreathes, and that they throw the first-fruits of spring, — apples and cherries, — into the fire. In a subsequent part of the song one can infer from the word *Rutafa* that this plant also played an important part in the ceremony. This plant is the Artemisia Abrotanum L., and Hungarians call one of its varieties Saint John's herb, Artemisia vulgaris. The former is the symbol of virginal purity. Anyhow

Anyhow
527 the «ruta» is a famous herb, one ancient record refers to
●782 it in connection with frankincense; according to another
[824] it sharpens the eye-sight, according to a third snakes hate its smell, — just as the devils hate that of frankincense. Once upon a time human beings were sacrificed, but later on only the symbol of virginal purity was offered up to the summer sun, just as on the Hungarian Ducking Monday girls were once really thrown into the water, whereas later on they were merely made soaking wet at the well. Later still, one bucket of water was enough, while to-day merely a few drops of scent represent the once drastic custom of Ducking Monday... Thus both a custom and a ceremony, which in olden times were serious and solemn, have become senseless games.

527 But let us continue with the thread of the song. Now comes the catharsis, the purifying part of the ceremony, when the young couples jump over the square fire, which flames to the four points of the compass. According to the test imposed by the song, they jump in couples and the magic song continues:

The «ruta» tree is tall
And it has many branches,
It has even leant over
The great sea.

One of its branches
Leant over the yard of (Paul Nagy)
Onto (Stephen Nagy)
Whose hair is silky but mouse coloured.

Its other branch leant
Over the yard of (Paul Kiss)
Onto (Anne Kiss)
Whose hair is silky but mouse coloured.
(Anne Kiss, Anne Kiss)
With the mouse coloured silken hair
Wears a crown of pearls on her hair.

The day of Saint Ivan is a mating feast, its ritual and aim are fully explained by the symbolic verses of the above songs. But many other customs are also connected with this day and the more famous were thus summed up by a learned Transylvanian Calvinist priest, Peter Bod (1712—1767): — «These were the things they used to do on that day: 1. The children collected all kinds of rubbish and bones in order to burn them and make a great smoke, the reason being that the pagans used to make fires about that time around the wells, so that snakes should not multiply in their neighbourhood, as usually happens about the day of Saint John. The Christians, in their ignorance, made fires about that same time and leapt over them, wishing that all their sadness might get burnt. — 2. They carried hot embers along the boundaries of their land, hoping that the harvest of the fields would thus be blessed. — 3. In some places they rolled wheels on that day, meaning that the sun had already reached the top of the horizon, and that everything was on the eve of change.»

We have already said what an effective drug the «ruta», mentioned in the song, proved against snakes, and we added that in an old Hungarian chronicle it was classed with frankincense. All the customs grouped on this day have also a purifying tendency.

According to a record of the second half of the last century, «they seek to drive away dragons and devils with the fragrant herbs thrown into the fire, so that harmful tempests shall not destroy the young crops, and the wells and springs shall not get poisoned. In some places, to this end they make evil smelling smoke by burning bones, dust and all kinds of rags, as though they wanted to drive away devils. Others make a fire on the edge of the crops and walk around them with hot embers. Others again lay a big fire at the end of a forest or at the foot of a hill, and sing

[The Hungarian peasants celebrating St Ivan's Day -- Analyst]

which was paid by the State for the erection, reconstruction and equipment of the buildings of the Reformed Church between August 1, 1946, and July 31, 1948. This real subsidy will also be reduced according to the above scale after every five-year period, and will cease entirely on December 31, 1968.

(d) Any other State subsidies which have been paid heretofore, will be paid according to the above rules on a decreasing scale.

(e) The State will take over the payment of sums paid out for pensions of members of the National Reformed Pastors' Pensions Institute, as well as those assisting the widows and orphans of these members, on the basis of the scale of civil servants' pensions and will also pay the pensions of those who are retired up till December 31, 1953.

6. Following the plain command of scripture the Hungarian Reformed Church in her Order of Worship will provide for intercessions for the Hungarian Republic, for the Head of the State, for the Government, and for the welfare and peace of the entire Hungarian people, as well as for Divine Service on State holidays, in conformity with the Word of God and the Confessions of the Church. She states that the new Hymnary which is about to be published, contains hymns appropriate to these occasions.

7. The Hungarian Reformed Church takes cognisance of the decision of the Government of the Hungarian Republic to nationalise, by legislation, non-State schools and such residential establishments as are organically connected with them.*

The action of nationalising the Reformed Church Schools will be governed by the following agreement :

(a) The Government will take into State service, as from July 1, 1948, all teaching and other personnel of nationalised schools and attached institutions, duly taking into account their length of service.

(b) The titles to the buildings of nationalised schools and attached institutions, as well as to the glebes assigned to the teachers, will be transferred to the State, together with all liabilities incurred before May 15, 1948, as entered in the land register or otherwise proved. Should disputes arise in connection with claims after considering the proposals of the Joint Commission constituted according to Para. 1, the final decision will rest with the Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Education.

(c) The Government agrees to the arrangement whereby those members of the teaching staff who are serving as Church precentors may continue this work on the existing terms, for two years after the date of this Agreement. That part

* Dormitories.